

Growing the African voice in determining the health agenda

Francis Omaswa introduces a new book: 'African Health Leaders; making change and claiming the future'



I hope that most of you have already heard of the launch of the new book 'African Health Leaders; making change and claiming the future', which was first launched in September 2014 during the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in New York. A number of contributions by the community of the Ashgovnet Discussion Forum have made their way into this book with acknowledgements. The book is edited by Lord Nigel Crisp and myself, and published by the Oxford University Press (OUP). There are supporting statements from the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Her Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, and the Head of Health, Nutrition and Population at the World Bank, Dr. Tim Evans. It is available to order online and on the OUP distribution systems.

So, what is this book about? Most accounts of health and healthcare in Africa are written by foreigners. This book starts to redress that balance. The contributors to this book represent only a tiny fraction of the many other Africans who have achieved so much under some of the most difficult circumstances in the world, yet their work is neither documented nor recognised. The contributors include 23 Africans and one European, from across three generations, 14 countries, and with a gender balance. The authors are individuals who have personally contributed to major achievements in health within their countries in diverse health fields. They are celebrated as actual doers and not just the usual commentators. The experiences described by the authors are unique and are achievements that have never before been told in the same original and authentic narration.

The book recognises that Africa is more stable and more hopeful again following the disappointments that dashed the pre and post-independence high expectations. The African Union is more about people-

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centred development and has zero tolerance for illegitimacy. This is backed by a strong global movement on equity, social justice and solidarity. As a result of these African economies are growing. The book calls upon Africans, especially the techno-professionals, to step up and do more for themselves and their people, and be more accountable. The book calls Africa's international partners to walk the talk in fulfilling the rhetoric of seeing Africa in a new way by supporting the growth of African institutions and individuals that are rooted in the culture and context of the African situation. The raw materials upon which to build are right there in the countries as demonstrated by the achievements narrated in the book. This is how the much vaunted ownership and sustainable solutions will be generated. A vision for the future is articulated where health is made in the homes of the people, universal health coverage and unrelenting pursuit of quality. The book looks forward to a world where we are all working together in partnership; learning from each other in collaboration, co-development and solidarity.

What difference do we expect this book to make? This book is timely as its release coincides with UN discussions on the Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals. It is hoped that the book will contribute these discussions; a reason it was launched during the last Assembly in New York. So far the book has had a fair airing during three separate launch events in New York, two in Cape Town during the Global Forum on Health Systems Research, two events in London including the Houses of Parliament, and in Uganda. Other opportunities to disseminate the message of the book are planned. Over time, especially if African techno-professionals heed this call, a new relationship and mindset will prevail and accelerate health development in Africa. I encourage you all to read this book. We welcome your comments and offers to debate, discuss and disseminate the message of this book through individual contact, country or regional events.